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# Radio Service

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INFORMATION

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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "A Boys' Garden Club." Information from the Bureau of Plant Industry, United States Department of Agriculture.

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Whenever you and I have had a talk about gardens, we have always quoted our friend, W.R.B. -- in other words, Mr. W. R. Beattie, who has been the radio garden advisor for the Department of Agriculture for a long time. Well, I've passed along to you W.R.B.'s helpful garden advice all these years, but I just realized the other day that I had never told you about his garden club for boys. W.R.B. is not only garden advisor over the air; he is also garden advisor to a club of boys, eighty strong, in Washington, D.C., who are some of the most enthusiastic vegetable growers you ever met. I'll like to tell you the story of this club. You might want to organize one like it in your town this summer.

About eleven years ago a public-spirited Washington woman started the idea. She was trying to help solve the problem of the active schoolboy's summer vacation time. She realized that the long hot empty days in summer are often not very happy for the boy who is penned up in the city and has nothing interesting to do. School is out and he is too young to work, so he often gets into mischief just from boredom. This Washington woman started what she called a "garden camp" on some undeveloped land near her home. She laid out a dozen plots of ground -- space of gardens for twelve boys from eight to fourteen in age. On each plot she pitched a tent where the boy could live right on his own garden. She provided the seeds and fertilizer and most of the garden tools but the boys brought some tools from their homes.

The garden that first year didn't thrive very well because of poor soil and too much shade, but the idea was a tremendous success. The second year the club had three times as many boys as gardens. So right away, it needed a larger, better piece of land, and also an expert to show the boys how to make the most of their gardens. At this point they called in W.R.B. for consultation. He arranged for a good location on some Government land, and the boys have been gardening there ever since. In ten years the club has grown to eighty members and would be much larger if it had more land. Very early in its history, the group had the problem of financing the purchase of seeds, plants, tools and so on. The boys appealed to a citizen's club in Washington -- the Civitan Club, and for the past years these men have been godfathers to the young gardeners.

On any Saturday from early spring on, you can see the boys hard at work on their garden plots. Just as soon as the ground is soft enough in the spring they go out. They do most of their gardening on Saturday because most of them have newspaper routes that fill up free time on week days. By the middle of May they begin to gather their own radishes and lettuce and spinach. From that time on until frost in late October or early November, they always have some fresh vegetables ready to gather from their gardens.



Of course, all vegetables raised belong to the gardener. He can sell them, take them home, or give them to his friends. You'll be interested to know that most of the products appear on the dinner tables in the boys' homes. The windup job of the gardening season is digging sweetpotatoes. This is an exciting occasion -- plenty of rivalry over who has the largest yield and the biggest sweetpotato. The boys' sweetpotato crop last year totaled nearly 150 bushels -- not bad for only seventy or seventy-five small gardens.

The gardens are only 35 by 50 to 70 feet, but the boys work every inch of soil to make it produce to capacity. The gardens are laid out carefully with walks between so that each boy has his own definite plot. One of the few rules of the club is that each member must keep his plot clean and well-cultivated. If any member neglects his garden for three weeks or wilfully fails to attend the garden meetings, he loses claim to his plot. Then the boy whose name stands next on the waiting list eagerly claims it.

At the end of the gardening season, the twelve boys who make the best record in the work receive a week's outing at the Y.M.C.A. summer camp on the Rhodes River in Maryland. And on the final Saturday of that week, all the boys come to this camp for a big picnic.

The club doesn't disband when the garden season ends. The boys have meetings once a month during the winter to make plans and keep the organization together. The boys themselves run their club; they elect their own officers, make their own rules and largely conduct all the affairs. And from the minute a boy places his name on the waiting list for a garden, he learns the club's viewpoint on honesty and the proper respect for the rights of others. Woe betide the boy who is caught redhanded in the act of appropriating unto himself what belongs to another member.

Perhaps you have heard that this club has served as a pattern for other clubs in other cities. Such boys' gardens have three important points in their favor. They keep the boys occupied and off the streets. They keep them interested in a productive outdoor enterprise. And they produce food for many home tables that are in great need of it. Of course, the leader of a club like this has a great deal to do with its success. He has to arrange about funds to buy seeds and fertilizers, about the land, the plowing and so on. Our friend W.R.B. thinks that much of his success is the result of his background of experience. He used to be a farmer in summer and a school teacher in winter, so he knows the ways of vegetables and also of boys.

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